

For Immediate Release
June 29, 2006

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A Year-round Celebration
by Senator Larry Craig

I love Independence Day. I often spend the holiday traveling across Idaho to participate in parades and festivities, meeting and talking with people, and taking a moment to remember the patriots, past and present, who make this day worth celebrating. From Trenton, New Jersey to Guadalcanal to Najaf, Iraq to Kandahar, Afghanistan, American soldiers have been sacrificing to bring the freedoms we celebrate on this special day to millions of people who have known nothing but oppression and fear.

Their sacrifice brings to mind a very important question. How can we best honor the sacrifices of generations of American patriots? If you've seen the excellent WWII movie, "Saving Private Ryan," you may remember one of the closing scenes. Tom Hanks' character, Captain John Miller, as he slowly succumbs to his wounds on the battlefield, poignantly exhorts Private Ryan to live a life worthy of the sacrifices of the men who died that day. "Earn this," he says.

It is appropriate that we celebrate Independence Day each year by displaying the flag, honoring veterans at parades, and enjoying, with barbecues, beverages and fireworks, all the bounty our country has to offer. However, celebrating one day out of the year, or even one day out of the month is not enough to redeem the blood of patriots.

American men and women of each generation gave up their remaining days on earth for you. Days of swimming in cool lakes and streams, hunting and fishing, spending time with the people they love, raising families, or going to work or school, they gave so that we may continue to do those very things whenever and however we please. What they wouldn't give to walk the earth for one more day...Is their sacrifice so cheap?

No, it certainly isn't. But for many of us, we do cheapen these gifts – not actively, by denouncing the American Revolution or renouncing the gifts of our patriots or the American way of life. We cheapen them passively – by sitting by and watching, by failing to participate in our communities, by thinking we can't do anything to impact events around us.

You don't have to run for office to make your town, your state or this nation a better place. Every person has different talents and interests, and it is up to you to find the best way to harness them. Perhaps you could attend a city council meeting to express your views on a local issue that's important to you, or write a letter to your mayor, county commissioner, or state legislator. Would you donate your

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time or your cooking skills at a shelter for the homeless or battered women? Would you be willing to pick up litter alongside the highway? Could you buy groceries for a neighbor struggling to make ends meet? Would you read a book with your son or daughter and let them know how important they are to you?

It is not beyond your power to make your street, your neighborhood or your town a better place through your generosity and your talents.

Celebrating America's independence is not just about taking in all that is good about our great nation for one day. It is also about giving, every day, to improve the lives of others, and, as the preamble to the Constitution says, securing "the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."

Small acts can have far-reaching consequences. Don't just celebrate our independence once a year. Heed the call of those who died so you may be free: "Earn this."